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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 KINSHASA 000380

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [KDEM](#) [KPKO](#) [CG](#)
SUBJECT: WESTERN KASAI: CALM, BUT UNPREDICTABLE

Classified By: PolOff CBrown, reasons 1.4 b/d.

¶1. (C) Summary: PolOff and EconOff February 21-23 visited Kananga, the capital of Eastern Kasai province. During the visit, PolOff met with a variety of local political representatives and civil society actors to gauge the province's preparedness for national elections in 2006 and the potential for violence in the coming months. While a highly politicized area, due largely to the strength of the long-time opposition party Union for Democracy and Social Progress (UDPS), Western Kasai remains relatively calm in the pre-election period. However, in conversations with PolOff, most political parties demonstrated little understanding of the electoral decisions being made at the national level in Kinshasa. The possibility of violence will rest largely in the hands of the UDPS, which, while remaining the major political player in urban areas, no longer wields as much influence and power throughout the entire province. End summary.

¶2. (C) PolOff and EconOff conducted a three-day visit February 21-23 to the provincial capital Kananga in Western Kasai. In a series of meetings with local politicians, political party representatives, economic and business leaders, and civil society actors, Embassy officials received a detailed picture of the political realities in the province. (Economic conditions will be reported septel.) Almost all political activity in Western Kasai is focused on preparing for the upcoming national, legislative and provincial elections in 2006. Political actors in the province, however, feel marginalized by the central government, due in large part to their belief that Western Kasai will be under-represented in the future government. This mindset is reinforced by repeated calls from the UDPS to reopen voter registration centers in the province, so that those who boycotted the registration process (at the behest of the UDPS in the first place) will be allowed to vote. (Note: Arguments that Kasaians will be under-represented are specious, as enrollment statistics show that nearly 90 percent of the estimated eligible population in the two Kasai provinces registered to vote. Moreover, each Kasai district, on average, will have roughly the same number of seats in the National Assembly as other districts in the DRC. Thus, the Kasais are only "under-represented" to the extent that they have a smaller population than other areas of the country. End note.)

UDPS: POWER WANES BUT PROBLEM REMAINS

¶3. (C) Kananga is a major stronghold (and thus a major hotbed of activity) for the UDPS. Political observers in the

province concede the party is still very popular and can easily mobilize its followers. During the December 2005 constitutional referendum, for example, the UDPS called for a boycott of the vote. In Western Kasai, UDPS supporters apparently heeded that call, at least in Kananga. Overall participation in the province was 46 percent, while in Kananga it was just 16 percent. In other areas of the province, however, participation rates reached as high as 80 percent. MONUC-Kananga Head of Office Jean Victor Nkolo said the disparity in the participation figures demonstrates that the UDPS does have influence (for example, among politically angry, disaffected youth) in the cities, but its influence is more limited in rural areas of the province. Nkolo said the party's message of boycott and rejection is not filtering down through the province, and the UDPS itself is not strongly present outside of Kananga. Consequently, Nkolo said the UDPS is running behind in its election preparations, leaving a political void for other parties to fill.

¶4. (C) During a contentious meeting with provincial UDPS representatives, PolOff was subject to a string of anti-U.S. and anti-international community invective. UDPS officials blamed the USG for abandoning the Congolese people and allowing the country to be "raped and looted" by former dictator Mobutu Sese Seko. They further charged the USG was actively backing the "assassins" in power in the current transitional government at the expense of democracy. UDPS officials claimed the USG and other members of the International Committee to Accompany the Transition (CIAT) were working to exclude the UDPS from elections by not allowing registration centers to reopen. After hearing the USG and the Ambassador being repeatedly called "liars" and "thieves," PolOff suggested that such language was not helpful in fostering a dialogue, and did little to improve

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the party's reputation in the international community. PolOff explained to the delegates that no one in the CIAT, particularly the USG, wished to see the UDPS excluded from the process, and in fact welcomed their participation. PolOff also reminded the officials that it was the Independent Electoral Commission (CEI) that decided it would be impossible to restart the voter registration process.

¶5. (C) The UDPS officials, however, remained adamant that the CEI, the CIAT and the transitional government were all actively working against them. The representatives claimed all they wanted were free and credible elections, and they would certainly participate in the elections. In fact, the officials said they had just completed the training of 400 elections monitors. However, the UDPS delegates continued to push for the reopening of registration centers and presented their demand as an ultimatum. UDPS provincial president Brandard Tshimbombo told PolOff there would be a "revolution" in the DRC if the USG did nothing to reopen the centers. Asked what he meant by that, Tshimbombo would not elaborate, saying only that the people of Western Kasai were "unhappy" and would accept being "mistreated any longer."

OTHER PARTIES READY TO FILL THE VOID

¶6. (C) While the UDPS continues to fulminate over perceived mistreatment at the hands of the CEI and the CIAT, other political parties in Western Kasai are busily preparing candidates and campaigns. PolOff met with representatives of the three major DRC political parties (People's Party for Reconstruction and Development -- PPRD, the Movement for the Liberation of Congo -- MLC, and the Rally for Congolese Democracy-Goma -- RCD-G), and found them actively working to pull support away from the UDPS. The delegates from all three parties expressed confidence in their abilities to win a majority of parliamentary seats in the upcoming elections.

¶7. (C) The PPRD ought to be able to take advantage of the

fact that their provincial governor of Western Kasai, Andre-Claudel Lubaya, is from their party. MONUC Head of Office Nkolo said Lubaya has been very active during the pre-elections period, helping elections workers get paid and being very visible in promoting what he (i.e., the PPRD) has done for the province. Nkolo said Lubaya's activities have been clearly political and are meant to advance the chances of his party. However, in speaking with PPRD provincial officials, PolOff received a less rosy picture of the PPRD's preparedness in the province. The PPRD representative said the party lacks communications equipment, transportation and other logistical support. Moreover, the PPRD delegates could not clearly articulate the party's campaign strategy or point to concrete steps the PPRD would take to improve the lives of Kasaians.

18. (C) The RCD-G and MLC have already begun preparing for the elections. RCD-G representatives, while confident of their chances, said they were prepared to collaborate with other political parties in the province. (Note: If true, this would indicate a long-rumored alliance between the RCD and the UDPS, which would certainly bolster the prospects of the RCD in the region and permit both parties to present themselves as more nationally-based entities. End note.) In addition, the RCD delegates said they had representatives in each territory of the province. The MLC provincial representatives also appeared to be well-prepared for elections, claiming they were training elections observers and were establishing offices throughout the province. The MLC delegates also laid out to PolOff a picture of their party's political platform and enumerated a list of immediate problems to be addressed in Kananga, such as electrification and the establishment of the rule of law.

UDPS ISN'T THE ONLY ONE MISINFORMED

19. (C) PolOff met with civil society representatives, who attempt to serve as a conduit of political information between the local population and political parties in the province. Civil Society President Alex Mukanya and Vice President Alphonse Kumwimba expressed many of the same frustrations as the UDPS. In fact, the complaints heard from civil society were for the most part a reiteration of the typical UDPS line that Kasaians (and the UDPS) are the great "martyrs" of the Congolese political class. Mukanya and

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Kumwinba charged that the international community was hypocritical for simultaneously demanding the UDPS take part in elections but at the same time excluding them from the process by not reopening registration centers. Mukanya said the group was simply expressing the concerns of the voters, but admitted they themselves did not understand why the USG was not doing more to ensure "inclusivity." Other members of the civil society delegation expressed their belief that a "cabal" was working against the DRC. One representative asked why the international community was imposing its choice of president on the Congolese people, and why European Union Development Commissioner Louis Michel was making decisions not in the interests of Congolese.

110. (C) PolOff again explained the USG position that the CEI had made the decision not to reopen registration centers, and the USG and the CIAT supported the CEI's decision. PolOff further pointed out that it was the UDPS that called for a boycott of registration and the constitutional referendum, and now therefore had to live with the political consequences of that decision. Mukanya responded that Kasaians would not respect or accept elections results so long as the UDPS is excluded from the process, and intimated that violence could occur if the process is deemed "illegitimate." PolOff reiterated that the UDPS was in no way barred from taking part in elections, and urged civil society to advocate for calm before, during and after the vote.

THE CEI ADDS TO THE PROBLEM

¶11. (C) Part of the mistrust of the elections process from political actors in Kananga comes from the poor preparation of the CEI during the constitutional referendum. During every meeting with political party officials, there was at least one mention of how badly the CEI conducted voting operations, and how ill-prepared the Commission is for national elections. PolOff visited CEI's Kananga headquarters February 23 and came across a dilapidated structure with only a handful of workers present. Behind the building, several official CEI vehicles were in various states of disrepair.

¶12. (C) PolOff met with CEI provincial coordinator Ntambwa Kapambu, who provided an uninspiring picture of the CEI's activities in the province. Kapambu said his organization was severely short of funding and was not able to purchase additional vehicles for transporting elections materials. In fact, he said his office actually has fewer usable bikes, trucks and cars at its disposal for national elections than it did for the referendum. Kapambu explained the CEI national office has not provided additional funding despite his requests. In addition, Kapambu said his office has no line of credit to make any purchases, and still owes over 20,000 USD for rent and other services incurred during the December referendum. (Note: CEI officials in Kinshasa verified March 6 that such debt does exist, despite earlier claims that the Commission had settled its outstanding balances earlier this year. End note.) Perhaps most distressingly, Kapambu said he had "no idea" who would be responsible for the civic education campaign for the upcoming elections, and could not provide any plan for one when asked.

COMMENT: MISUNDERSTANDINGS COULD BE MANIPULATED

¶13. (C) The population of Western Kasai seems prepared to participate in elections but tension and the potential for unrest lie just below the surface. As evidenced during a variety of meetings with provincial officials, there is a great deal of misunderstanding of the political process in the DRC -- from the reasons behind the CEI's decision not to reopen registration centers to the belief by the UDPS that they are being actively excluded from the electoral process. This sense of disenfranchisement and martyrdom are simmering flashpoints in the province which could easily be manipulated. End summary.
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